

MACBITER

It may be too late for Christmas, but if you're thinking of buying MacBiter a present in the near-future, he has one small request: please make sure it's not digital

I hope your hangover has finally died away, that your stomach has recovered and that you discovered the pool of vomit in your left shoe before, not after, you put it on. In other words, I hope the festivities agreed with you. I have no idea whether or not they agreed with me, because as I write this Christmas hasn't yet happened; but to nullify the awkward effect of 'lead time' I have to pretend it has and write in the past tense, whereas to me it's all actually an indistinct and probably bilious near-future.

Anyway, here are some of the Christmas presents I really hope I didn't get:

• **An iPod or other MP3 player** of any shape or flavour. Ever since the Walkman appeared, I have been of the opinion that the desire to carry your own soundtrack with you wherever you go betrays a discontinuity of approach towards real life that truly borders on the psychotic. That millions of you appear to do so is a scary statistic, but does not alter my determination never to sashay around in public plugged into any visible device, such as an iPod, Bluetooth Earring from Hell or palmtop. (My portable dialysis machine is another matter, since this is a health issue.)

• **Bluetooth Earring from Hell.** See above.

• **A new Mac.** Since there is nobody in my life likely to part with enough wedge to buy a computer just to make my Christmas a bit brighter, this is a remote contingency. But in any case, there has never been a worse time to buy a new Mac, since the current range of machines on offer are all G5/G4-driven, and within six months or so Apple will be well on the way to switching to an entirely different family of processors. Any Macs sold over the Christmas period will be obsolescent before the poor owners have switched them on.

• **Any kind of upgrade** for my G4. There is, amazingly, still a residual aftermarket for Mac owners who want a bit more oomph but not the expense of buying a new Mac. This usually involves plugging in some sort of card, either PCI or (frighteningly) motherboard-

mounted. Sometimes you notice the difference, sometimes you don't; the only thing one can say for sure about aftermarket upgrades is that the very next revision of the Mac OS will see them stop working.

• **A new mobile phone.** My current Nokia was the bottom of the range three years ago and is now elderly and austere, but it fits my hands-free carphone cradle and that's what's important to me. The buttons are also big enough for my huge, lumpen fingers. I don't want a camera, I don't want video output (really handy at 80mph on the M25). I just want a phone, and that's what I've got.

who write the software. Despite the variables, it's their script, not yours. Plug in, switch on, grab a controller and say goodbye forever to your capacity to grow either mentally or spiritually. In fact, say goodbye to the human race.

• **The new Xbox.** See above.

• **A Sky subscription.** I have written at length in these pages (or should I say page?) about the utter awfulness of the Sky TV product, particularly the loathsome loan-shark ads. I cancelled mine 18 months ago. I had to have an exorcist in afterwards, but the bumping in the night seems to have died away now. Yet I still

want to go faster than dial-up I would have to open a new account with somebody else and start paying. I don't want it that badly, though there are a few smutty movies I wouldn't mind downloading.

• **A digital camera.** To be honest, I would like one of these as well, but if anybody gives me one it'll be one of those cheap models that cost about £100, whereas what I really want is one of those flash, expensive jobs, a camera that takes 35mm SLR lenses and is the business when it comes to proving once and for all what a crap photographer one can be.

• **A digital radio.** Now we can enjoy broadcast crap without interference and with none of that fiddly tuning – it's menu-driven! Or rather, you can enjoy it, since I'll pass. My old cat's-whisker crystal set is still giving sterling service, anyway, not that I ever listen to it.

GONE IN A FLASH

It's time to assess this list of Not Wanted and see what they have in common. That's easy: they're all digital devices. Notwithstanding this is a magazine devoted to digitalia, there is something fundamentally naff about this stuff, all of it. Some products, such as Chippendale chairs, are built to last. Digital stuff is built not to last, which rather reduces its gift value in my eyes.

Here's the list of stuff I think I am going to get. All unglamorous but sorely needed (don't even consider going there):

- Socks
- Underpants
- Haemorrhoid ointment

And finally, a list of what I would really like to get but have no hope in hell of getting:

- An Eddie Stobart ten-wheeler full of exotic booze and luxury foodstuffs.
- A written guarantee from the editors of *Computer Shopper* that this column will definitely still be here in 12 months' time, even if by then it has shrunk to the size of a postage stamp. 



• **A BlackBerry.** Can you think of anything more nightmarish than email wherever you go? One of the last places you could be out of reach of the Octopus's tentacles – even if for a short time – was the khazi, but now there is absolutely no excuse. Put it another way: MPs all have BlackBerrys; can you think of a better reason for not having one?

• **The new PlayStation.** I don't care how 128-bit and 3D the graphics are, or what motor skills their use sharpens up, these gadgets are shallow beyond belief. You think the little kick-boxers onscreen are dancing to your tune, but in fact you are dancing to the tune of the guys

occasionally glimpse Carol Vorderman on TV, and when I do it gives me the shivers.

• **A Freeview digibox.** I don't want one because I already have one. It cost 35 quid at Tesco. It's crap, with a 20-second time-lag on the controller, so selecting channels is rather like picking off moving ducks in a funfair gallery. Nearly all the channels are also crap, including those you don't need a digibox for.

• **A broadband line.** Actually I would rather like one of these, but at the moment I have got a free dial-up account with AOL. Since AOL doesn't do – and as far as I can see will never do – broadband for the Mac, if I

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